

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUDAPE 01405 301024Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 CU-02 DHA-02 /062 W
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P R 291407Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0000
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUDAPEST 1405

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: HU, US, PFOR, SCUL
SUBJECT: BILLY GRAHAM MAY PAY EVANGELISTIC VISIT TO HUNGARY

1. ON APRIL 28, DR. WALTER SMYTH, INTERNATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT OF BILLY GRAHAM EVANGELISTIC ASSOCIATION, AND DR. ALEXANDER HARASZTI, AMERICAN SURGEON OF HUNGARIAN DESCENT WHO ACTIVE IN U.S. CHURCH AFFAIRS, ARRIVED UNANNOUNCED AT EMBASSY AT TIME WHEN CHARGE NOT AVAILABLE. THEY WERE RECEIVED BY POLOFF WITH WHOM THEY DISCUSSED PROJECTED VISIT OF MR. GRAHAM TO HUNGARY. ACCORDING TO SMYTH AND HARASZTI, POSSIBILITY OF MR. GRAHAM CONDUCTING SERIES OF EVANGELIC MEETINGS IN HUNGARY HAS BEEN UNDER DISCUSSION WITH HUNGARIAN CHURCH LEADERS, NOTABLY SANDOR PALOTAI, PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL OF FREE CHURCHES, FOR SOME TIME. IF GOH APPROVAL IS OBTAINED, MR. GRAHAM MIGHT COME TO HUNGARY THIS SUMMER TO SPEAK AT SEVERAL HUNGARIAN CHURCHES. SMYTH EXPECTS MR. GRAHAM WOULD BE RECEIVED BY HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AND BY KEY RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF ALL HUNGARIAN CHURCHES, AND THAT VISIT WOULD BE NOTED BY MEDIA. INTENTION IS TO KEEP EACH EVANGELICAL MEETING SMALL (SEVERAL HUNDREDS TO A FEW THOUSAND PEOPLE). IN THIS WAY THEY FEEL MEETINGS WOULD NOT "GET OUT OF HAND" NOR CREATE DIFFICULTIES FOR GOH WITH ITS ALLIES.

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2. ACCORDING TO HARASZTI, FREE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES HAS ABOUT 50,000 MEMBERS OFFICIALLY, THAT IS COUNTING FAMILY HEADS ONLY, BUT 150,000 INCLUDING ALL FAMILY MEMBERS. HE SAYS ITS MEMBER CHURCHES ARE MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN ITS NUMBERS ALONE WOULD INDICATE BECAUSE INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS ARE VERY ACTIVE. COMPONENT CHURCHES INCLUDE BAPTISTS (LARGEST), METHODISTS, PENTECOSTALS, SEVENTH

DAY ADVENTISTS, BRETHERN, AND UNOFFICIALLY, NAZARENES. LEADERS OF LUTHERAN, ZOLTAN KALTY, AND REFORMED, TIBOR BARTHA, CHURCHES ARE AWARE OF PLANS WHICH THEY ARE SAID TO REGARD SYMPATHETICALLY IN TERMS OF AFFECT ON STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN HUNGARY. THEY PLAN NO OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT, AT NATIONAL LEVEL, OF EVANGELICAL MEETINGS BUT SMYTH, WHO GAVE ADDRESS AT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY IN DEBRECEN APRIL 27, SAID COOPERATION BETWEEN LUTHERANS, CALVINISTS (REFORMED CHURCH), AND FREE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES WAS GOOD AND SOME LOCAL LUTHERAN AND CALVINIST CHURCHES MIGHT BE AMONG THOSE WHO RECEIVE BILLY GRAHAM IF HE COMES.

3. GOH ATTITUDE HAS NOT YET BEEN OFFICIALLY CONVEYED. IMRE MIKLOS TOLD PALOTAI AND SMYTH YESTERDAY THAT HE PERSONNALLY FAVORS VISIT BUT THAT AUTHORIZATION WOULD HAVE TO COME FROM HIGHER AUTHORITIES. MIKLOS GAVE NO INDICATION WHEN GOH MIGHT RESPOND TO COUNCIL OF FREE CHURCHES REQUEST BUT TACITLY INDICATED SUMMER VISIT IS FEASIBLE. SMYTH STILL NEEDS TO CHECK SEVERAL ALTERNATE DATES WITH MR. GRAHAM BEFORE DEFINITIVE PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO GOH. FROM CONVERSATIONS PALOTAI AND SMYTH HAVE HAD WITH MIKLOS AND EARLIER WITH OTHER GOH OFFICIALS, IT APPEARS GOH LOOKING AT THIS POTENTIAL VISIT IN TERMS OF ITS AFFECT ON ALL ASPECTS OF HUNGARIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, ON HUNGARY'S IMAGE IN WEST AND FORTHCOMING BELGRADE CSCE MEETING, WITH PERHAPS FIRST OF THESE FACTORS WEIGHING HEAVIEST.

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4. POLOFF GAVE HIS OPINION THAT BILLY GRAHAM EVANGELISTIC ASSOCIATION AND COUNCIL OF FREE CHURCHES MAKING REQUEST TO GOH AT PROPITIOUS MOMENT AND SUGGESTED THAT GRAHAM GROUP CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR VISIT THIS YEAR. HE FURTHER COUNSELED THAT HUNGARIANS VERY ABLE TO PERCEIVE THEMSELVES ADVANTAGE OF VISIT TO HUNGARY AND THAT SMYTH AND HARASZTI MERELY STRESS THESE ADVANTAGES IN GENERAL TERMS, THAT IS, NOTING VISIT WOULD DEMONSTRATE HUNGARY'S CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM TO OUTSIDE WORLD AND IMPROVE HUNGARY'S IMAGE ABROAD. HE SAID THEY SHOULD AVOID ANY REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE AFFECT ON SPECIFIC ISSUES IN U.S.-GOH RELATIONS.

5. SMYTH AND HARASZTI TRANSMITTED VIEW OF PALOTAI THAT THEY ENLIST SUPPORT OF AMERICAN EMBASSY, BUDAPEST, AND HUNGARIAN EMBASSY, WASHINGTON, FOR PROJECT. HARASZTI SAID THAT AMBASSADOR ESZTERGALYOS HAD ALREADY INDICATED HE FAVORED VISIT. HARASZTI WONDERED IF EMBASSY HERE COULD INTERVENE WITH MIKLOS. EMBOFF REPLIED THAT

SUPPORT OF HUNGARIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON IS OF GREAT VALUE, THAT GRAHAM GROUP SHOULD DEAL DIRECTLY WITH ESZTERGALYOS AND THAT THEY SHOULD REQUEST HIM TO MAKE HIS FAVORABLE VIEWS KNOWN IN BUDAPEST. EMBASSY WOULD BE GLAD TO INDICATE, IF ASKED, ITS SUPPORT OF GRAHAM'S VISIT BUT IT MIGHT BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE IF EMBASSY WERE TO RAISE SUBJECT ON ITS OWN INITIATIVE. BEST THING TO DO, HE SAID, IS TO AWAIT OFFICIAL GOH REACTION TO COUNCIL OF FREE CHURCHES PROPOSAL. (IN EMBASSY VIEW GOH IS BEST JUDGE OF ITS TOLERANCE LEVELS IN CASES SUCH AS THIS AND DOES NOT NEED EMBASSY ADVICE.).

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Message Attributes

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Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/023eb2a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
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